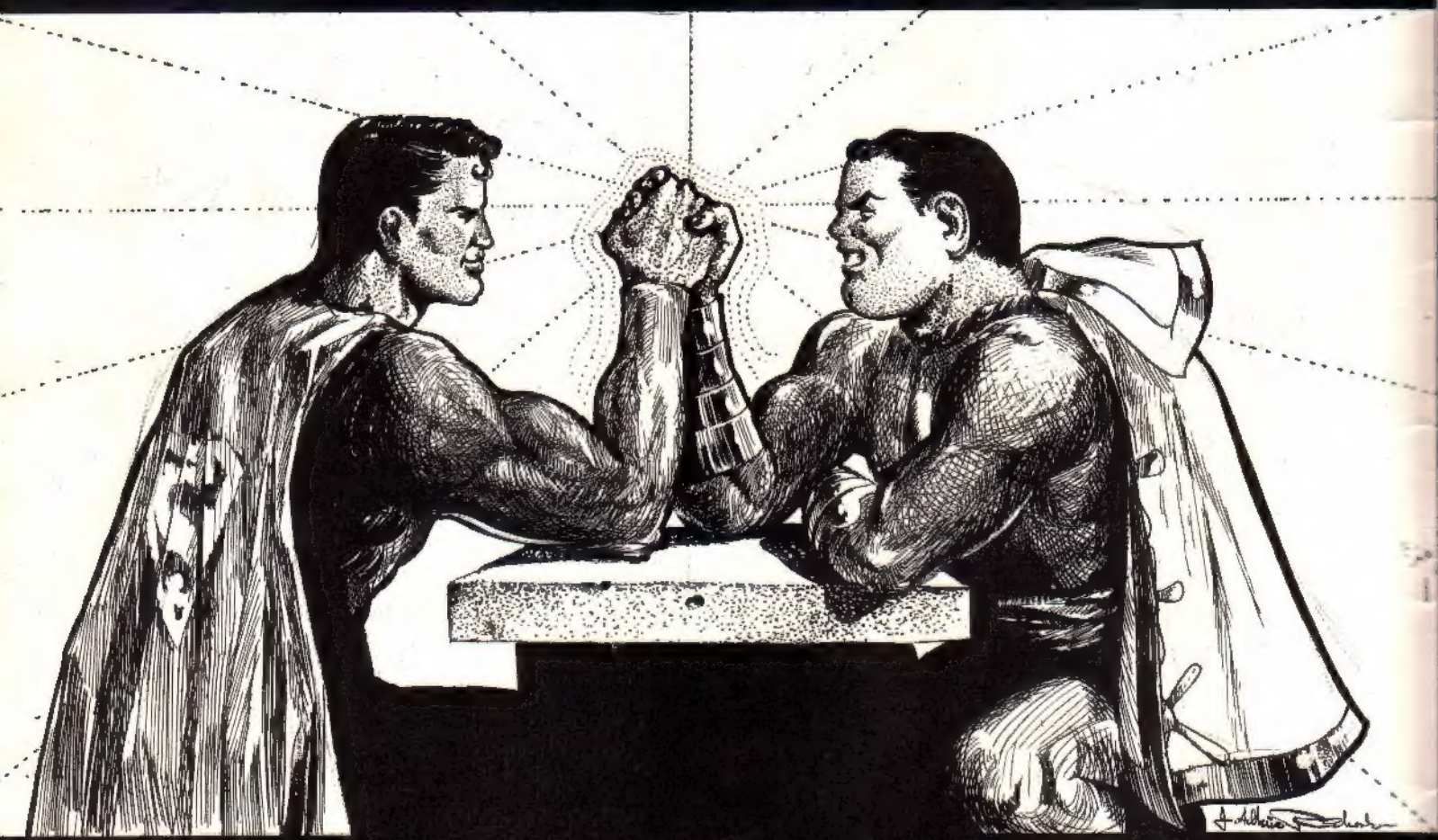
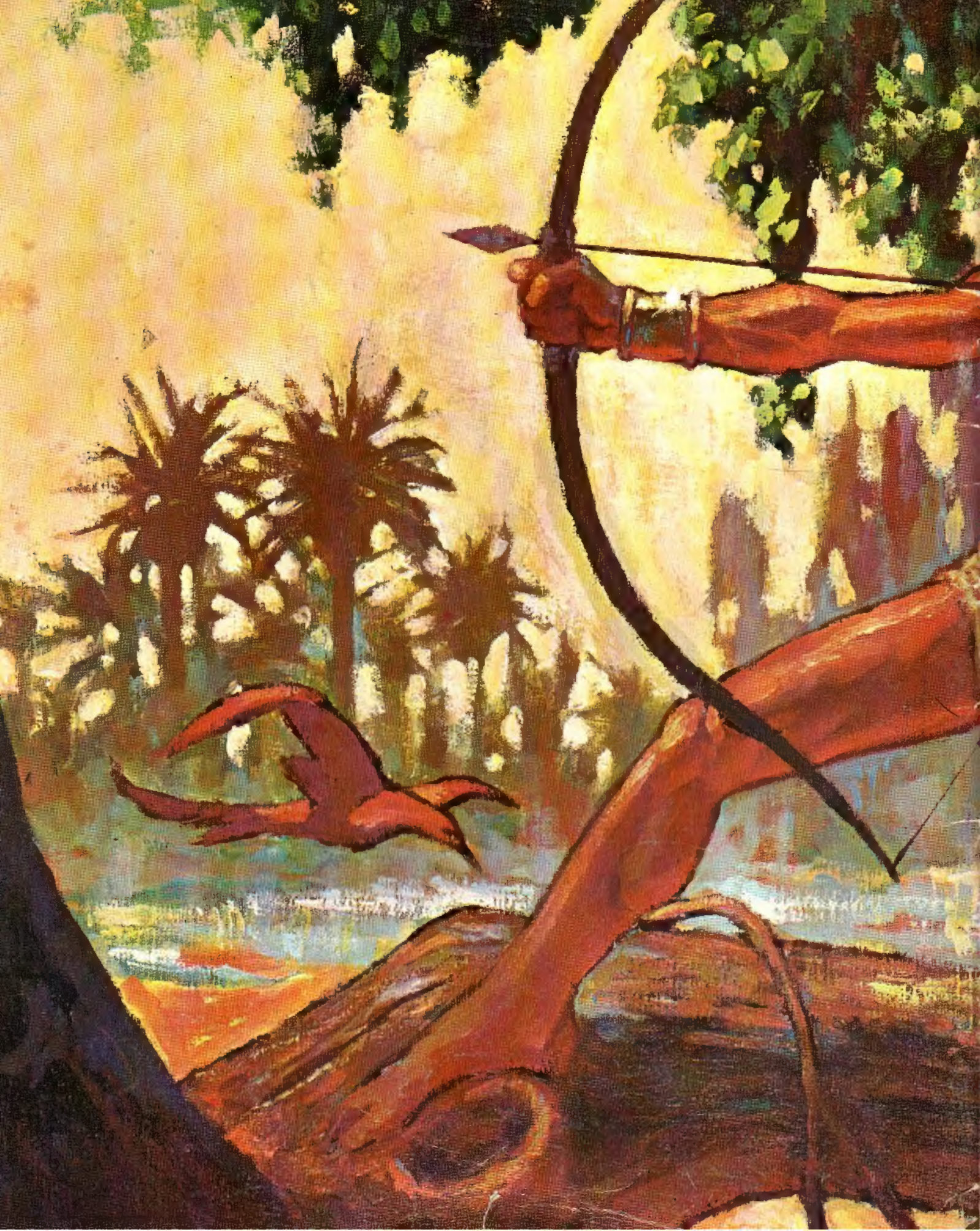
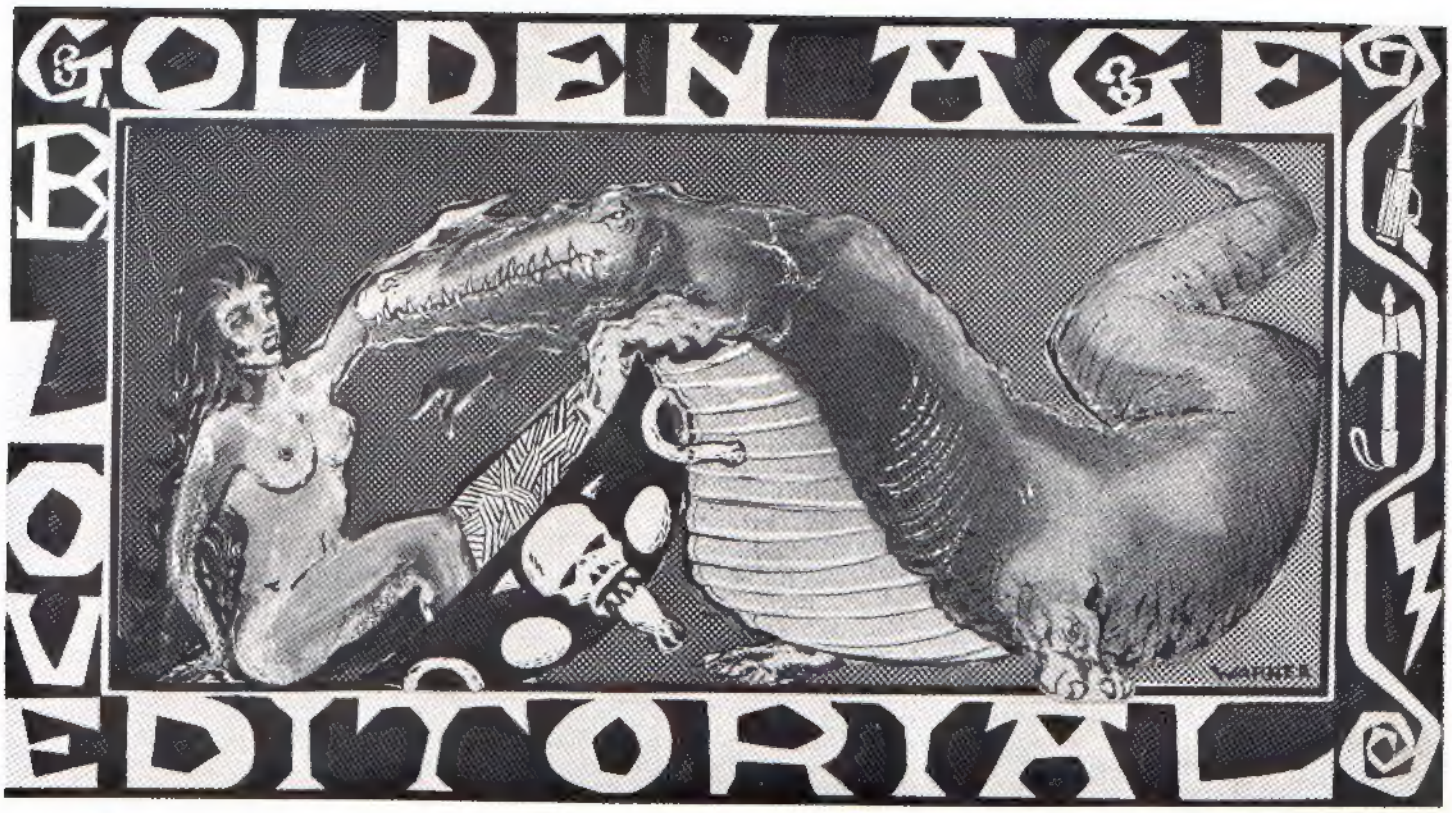
NEWTON—

GOLDEN AGE



No. 7





Most editorials of this type usually discuss and/or explain the contents of the issue and then after telling you how utterly outstanding it is, they then tell you "You ain't seen nothing yet" and proceed to extoll the virtues of the next proposed issue.

With one or two exceptions, the contents of this issue speak for themselves and and need no explanations or "golly gee whiz" comments from me. You will note, however, we have the beginning (4 pages reduced to 2 pages) of a proposed sword and sorcery strip by John Richardson. Both John and I would like to hear your reaction to it. I think you will also note that the typical fan interview is missing in that we feel the Richardson interview is quite different. The other exception we mentioned is the "GOLDEN AGE GREATS" feature. This is simply interpertations of various comic characters by various artists.

As I write this I have no idea when the next issue of THE GOLDEN AGE will be out nor do I know what it will contain. And to be frank, I'd like to rest on the laurels of this issue for awhile, rather than try and sell you the next one. Also, there are numerous other projects I want to complete before I start working on the next issue of THE GOLDEN AGE.

And lastly, I'd like to dedicate this issue: Not to President Nixon. Not to Frank Frazetta. Not to our gracious contributors. I hearby dedicate it to me. For without me, who in the devil would have gotten this thing done??

THE GOLDEN AGE #7, Winter 1971. Published by The S.F.C.A., 9875 SW 212 St., Miami, Fla. 33157. Price = $2.50. Editor & Publisher = G.B. Love. Editing and layouts by Andy Warner and G.B. Love. Nothing contained herein may be reprinted without written permission from the editor.

NEWTON

Rocketman flies again!

It was an impossible sight to behold! A man streaking high above a wooded hillside like a human rocket------a jet-propelled phantom of the sky! Now his target was in sight: a large truck carrying the most secretive project of 1949: a radar interceptor missile! The "rocketman" adjusts a small control pane adorning his chest and swoops headlong into the fleeing truck!

Just the kind of stuff of which we mortals dream, but to Republic's KING OF THE ROCKETMEN, it was all in an episodes work. Not since the "Golden Age" of serials, when the likes of CAPTAIN MARVEL, THE LONE RANGER, and SPY SMASHER graced the screen, had the cliffhanger fans been so enticed to return weekly to their local theatres. Republic, the undisputed leader in serial production, had drawn a winner and helped save the chapterplay from extinction..... .....at least momentarily.

KING OF THE ROCKETMEN boasted a screenplay written by three of Republic's veteran serial scripters: Sol Shor, William Lively, and Royal Cole. Shor joined the ranks of the top serial writers with his assistance on Republic's 1938 classic episoder, FIGHTING DEVIL DOGS. Lively's first contribution was JUNGLE GIRL (1941). Cole, a relative latecomer, didn't get started until 1943, when he contributed to SECRET SERVICE IN DARKEST AFRICA. Although they worked as a trio on only five serials (1949-50), individually Shor, lively and Cole helped script thirty-six of the sixty-six Republic serials.

Producer Franklin Adreon is generally credited with the conception of the "Rocketman" character. Adreon began his serial career at Republic as a writer on S.O.S. COASTGUARD in 1937. He graduated to the status of Associate Producer in 1948, and eventually took over both the producing and directing chores on all of the post-1953 Republics, including the last one, KING OF THE CARNIVAL (1955). Adreon's scripts were exciting enough, his production talents were adequate, but his direction and pacing of serials left much to be desired.

Although the serials directed by Fred C. Brannon were seriously marred by their small budgets, they are, for the most part, interesting and often have some very fine moments. Brannon was Republic's main cliffhanger mentor from '45 to '53. Even though the quality of his products never came close to the gems of William Whitney and John English, he must be admired for the craftsman he was. If nothing else, he was able to squeeze out a passable and often exciting serial on an almost non-existent budget.

The highlight of KING OF THE ROCKETMEN was, of course, the almost perfect flying sequences. These were the handiwork of Howard Lydecker, Republic's special effects genius. Lydecker often shared the credits with his brother, Theodore, but almost all of the miniature work, explosions, etc. were Howard's work. Nosone has ever been able to duplicate the realism of a Lydecker miniature or explosion. If you must be convinced take a look at the bi-plane-dirigible crash from Chapter 12 of KING OF THE TEXAS RANGERS or the Chapter 14 train-plane-car crash from DICK TRACY VS. CRIME INC.

To make Rocketman fly, Lydecker resorted to the method he first used in DARKEST AFRICA and later perfected in CAPTAIN MARVEL. A rigid, paper-mache' dummy was fitted with small casters on its heels and wrists. It was then placed on wires high above ground, strung at an angle. The dummy's own weight was its propulsion. To fly upward, the dummy was run backward down the wires, and the film, when projected, was run backwards. This effect, combined with a slight speeding up of the camera is almost flawless. Of course, rear projection was used on the close-ups. Unfortunately, they don't quite match the quality of CAPTAIN MARVEL.

But what cataclysmic menace gave birth to the dynamic Rocketman? In the opening minutes of the serial, newspaper headlines (sandwiched between "stock" Lydeckers) herald the mysterious accidents befalling Science Associates, a top-secret research association. One scientist is killed in a plane crash. Another is trapped in his car as it is plunged, via remote control, to the bottom of a mammoth grotto. A third, Professor Millard (James Craven), is apparently killed when his laboratory i is destroyed. Yet before each die, the mysterious voice of Dr. Vulcan is heard, gloating of his power to control their fate.

Girl reporter Glenda Thomas (Mae Clarke) begins investigating the matter, but is promptly ushered out by Jeff King (Tristam Coffin), a prominent member of Science Associates. During a meeting, the remaining members-----Professor Bryant (I. Stanford Jolley), Martin Conway (Ted Adams), Gunthar Von Strum (Stanley Price), and the Chairman (Douglas Evans)------decide that Jeff King should be in charge of investigating the sinister Dr. Vulcan. King also undertakes the task of protecting Science Associate's latest invention: the radar interceptor missile.

Later that night King v its his office, only to be greeted by two of Vulcan's minions, Dirken (Don Haggerty) and Blears (Dave Sharpe). Although held at gunpoint, King manages to disarm the heavies, and a famous Republic melee ensues. Throughout the serial Coffin was doubled by Tom Steele (replete with mustache). Dale Van Sickel took over for Haggerty, and Sharpe--of course--did his own. Sharpe, however, did not double for Coffin in all of the Rocketman scenes. Generally, he accounted for the leaps and acrobatics. Steele handled the rest fo the stunts.

King successfully defends himself, and the two heavies flee. The next morning, he drives to a secluded spot and enters a hidden cave. Here we find Professor Millard alive and hiding from Dr. Vulcan. It is explained that King saved Millard during the laboratory fire, and together they will work to stop Dr. Vulcan. Millard also advises King that he has finally completed the "flying suit", and gives it to him for further testing. Jeff then departs for a warehouse where the missile is secretly being stored.

Vulcan's men have already overpowered the warehouse guard when the scientist ventures upon the scene. Another fight follows, leaving King Unconscious. The crooks beat a hasty get-away with the missile hidden in a large, canvas-covered truck. King revives, but finds the crooks have removed the rotor from his car's distributor. He now has only one chance to overtake them---the untested rocket suit! Quickly he dons the futuristic garb and blasts skyward after the crooks. Glenda and Burt Winslow (House Peters, Jr.) arrive just in time to catch a glimpse of the spectacular sight.

Soon Rocketman catches the truck, and dives into the arms of Blears, while Dirken looks on, stunned by the sight of the fantastic man of the future. Without a word, the trio launches into another fistic forray. During the fight the missile dives toward the heart of the heavily populated city. Unable to deflect the missile, Rocketman takes careful aim with a strange-looking ray-gun and blasts the missile out of the sky. But the terrific explosion engulfs him, and he plunges, unconscious, to his doom!! .....and that was only chapter 1 !!!

In chapter 2, King, of course, revives in time, and streaks away unharmed. KING OF THE ROCKETMAN adhered to Republic's formula for serial, in reference to the scenario, at least. Analyze any Republic from this period, and the chapters, with little deviation, will go as follows: 1) solution to last week's cliffhanger 2), set-up for the middle action sequence--hero and/or sidekick is involved in a fight, chase, etc. 4) same as number 2, but pertaining to the episode's cliffhanger 5) final action sequence and cliffhanger. The exception to the rule being somewhere around chapter 10 or 11, where action footage from earlier episodes was repeated to enlighten new members of the audience. (It also helped pad the serial).

For the next ten episodes, Vulcan tries his best to defeat Rocketman and obtain the powerful Decimator, another of Millard's inventions. In chapter 2, Rocketman and Glenda plunge over a precipice, apparently to their death. Chapter 4 ends with Rocketman being knocked out an umpteen story window. Chapter 5's cliffhanger --"The Fatal Dive"-- has Glenda trapped in an airplane, which is under the control of Dr. Vulcan. Can Rocketman, jetting to the craft, reach her before the airplane crashes to the mountains below? In most cases, standard procedure would allow Rocketman to alite atop the aircraft, climb under the wing, free Glenda, and both would escape happily ever after. Not so!! Instead, he crashes head first into the door of the plane, smashing it to debri! He and Glenda then escape the flying coffin, shortly before it crashes.

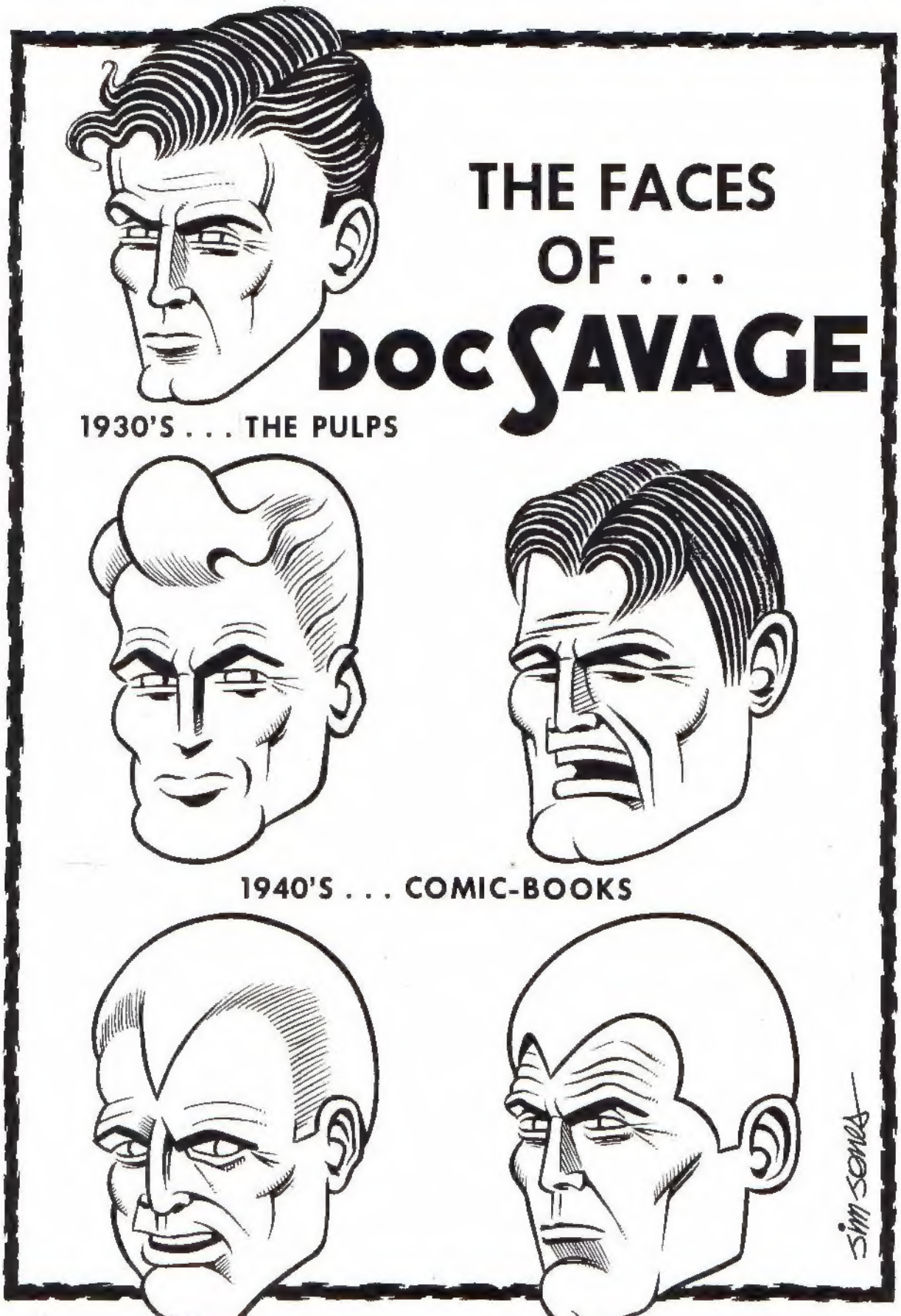
Millard meets an untimely demise in chapter 6 --"Molten Menace"-- but Vulcan doesn't get his hands on the Decimator until chapter 11. In the closing minutes of the same episode, Rocketman finally corners the evil one and reveals him to be Professor Bryant. (Secretly we all knew it was I. Stanford Jolley the minute we saw him in chapter 1) Vulcan, carrying a .38 in each hand, apparently backs Rocketman into a fiendish death beam and the episode ends in a shower of sparks.

The final episode reveals that it was actually one of Vulcan's men that was killed, not Rocketman. Vulcan and his minions manage to escape with the Decimator in their possession. The whole world waits breathlessly. No sign of either the scientist or the fiendish device. Finally Vulcan delivers an ultimatim: He must recieve one billion dollars, or he will destroy New York City!!

Carefully calculating the range of the Decimator (and the possible methods of destroying a city as large as New York) King deduces that Vulcan's retreat is a small island in the Atlantic. He further surmises that Vulcan plans to train the Decimator's powerful rays on the Amsterdam Fault and wreck the city with tremendous tidal waves. Donning the flying suit again, Rocketman blasts off for Vulcan's hiding place. Behind him a squadron of army bombers follow, but only Rocketman can reach the island in time to save the ill-fated metropolis. Rocketman nears the island just as Vulcan begins his dirty work. Already huge waves are pummeling the city. Skyscrapers fall like building blocks.....huge ships are tossed around like toys. This footage, originally the handiwork of Willis (KING KONG) O'Brien, originated in RKO's DELUGE, and was later incorporated into Republic's S.O.S. COASTGUARD and DICK TRACY VS. CRIME, INC. serials, plus the feature S.O.S. TIDAL WAVE.

In a beautifully photographed sequence, Rocketman flies low over a hill, zooms toward Vulcan's cabin, smashes through a window, does a forward roll and comes up throwing a punch to Dirken's jaw. Again another melee follows. Rendering Vulcan and company unconscious, Rocketman promptly blast the Decimator to atoms and streaks away, just as the bombers begin raking the isalnd (in a lot of obvious WWII footage). A bomb lands squarely on Vulcan's cabin, thus ending his menace once and for all.

Responce to the serial was so overwhelming that Republic lensed two more serials centered around the "Rocketman" character. These were RADAR MEN FROM THE MOON (1952) -- in which Rocketman became a new hero, "Commando Cody -- Sky Marshall of the Universe", and ZOMBIES OF THE STRATOSPHERE (1952) -- the character's name this time was Larry Stewart. Also there was COMMANDO CODY, a series of twelve 26 minute, serialized


THE FACES OF . . .
DOC SAVAGE
1930'S . . . THE PULPS
1940'S . . . COMIC-BOOKS
1966 . . . COMIC-BOOK
1960'S . . . POCKETBOOKS
SIM SONES

which was longer than the Doc Savage tale. Also in #10 was the origin story of what could have been a first class costumed character--The Thunderbolt. This story was beautifully done (by Paul Gustavson, at least partly, though Ray Miller says John Martin). At any rate the brains at Street & Smith decided this would be a solo and when #11 appeared, no Thunderbolt. #11 contained mostly fillers like "Oliphant Of West Point", "From Rags To Riches", and "Sons of Shangri-La." Vol. 2 #1 (#13) through vol. 2 #8 (#20, the last issue) tried half-heartedly to stay above water, but by vol. 2 #4 the last vestige of the Binder Studios was gone, and in vol. 2 #6 and 7 Doc had to share the cover, and on the next issue he lost it and the lead story to a strip titled "Huckleberry Finn". Ajax managed to last through vol. 2 #5. Astron lsted to the end, although she did not appear in #9 or 11. The Astron strip was the only one to retain the same artist (unknown) for the life of the strip. "Nick Carter" appeared in the last three issues, and "The Avenger" another pulp character who, like Doc Savage, was created by Lester Dent. Later issues seemed to concentrate on Radio personalities, and as early as the 9th issue Kay Kyser was featured. #13 had a feature on "Boake Carter." And #16 not only had a "Fanny Brice" strip but she was also cover featured with Doc. And on #18 he was co-featured with Lou Clark, who played Nick Carter on the radio. Henny Youngman followed suit in the next issue. Other strips in various issues were Thornton Fisher's sports highlights, "James J. JEFFRIES" (vol. 2 #5), "BRANCH RICKEY" (Vol. 2 #6),"K-9 V and his Sub Snatcher", about some Rin Tin Tin types (Vol. 2 #7) by Farr. "Gobs O' Fun", a comedy strip about sailors by Charles Wessell appeared in vol. 2 #1,5-8.

For those interested, I might mention that Ajax the Sun Man was similar to Fox Features' The Flame.

Since Doc Savage was the main strip in DSC, I'll trace the developement of that strip. As mentioned, the first attempts at adaptations of pulp novels were failures. Around #6 the page length on the strip was more than doubled, and the Binder Studios took over. Someone named Smith alternated with Jack Binder until Binder quit, when an artist with no talent finished it off. As to villains, Doc's major foe after the war started was The Skull (Captain America could fight the Red Skull, the Black Hood could fight the Skull, so why not Doc?). Doc also tackled the Peace Clan in #6 (obviously inspired by the KKK), The Giants of Destruction in #11, Living Evil in #13, Rocket Ship Pirates in #18, The Black Knight in #19. And he began an encounter with an Egyptian Pharoah in issue #20 that was to be continued in the next issue which, of course, was never published. In the other issues, the Skull was usually his foe.

I guess no matter what the editors at S&S did they couldn't make a go with DOC SAVAGE COMICS. Doc did continue with Nick Carter in THE SHADOW. Huck Finn, the last ditch effort to save DSC, later popped up in SUPER-SNIPE. However, when DOC SAVAGE COMICS finally died late in 1943, I doubt if anyone much cared. The last ten issues managed to make a monthly schedule, and, for awhile, when the Binders were handling it, it showed promise.

But some things just don't work out and I guess Doc Savage was never destined to succeed as a comic strip. It would take a fantastiely talented artist to carry it off, at any rate. Frazetta or perhaps williamson could do it; or even Crandall. But to summarize, I might say that DOC SAVAGE COMICS is hardly one of the gems of the Golden Age, but it could have been. Thus closes a phase of one of the less successful facets of The Man of Bronze.

THE END

FOX

FEATURES PRESENTS:

By DON NEWTON

the DART

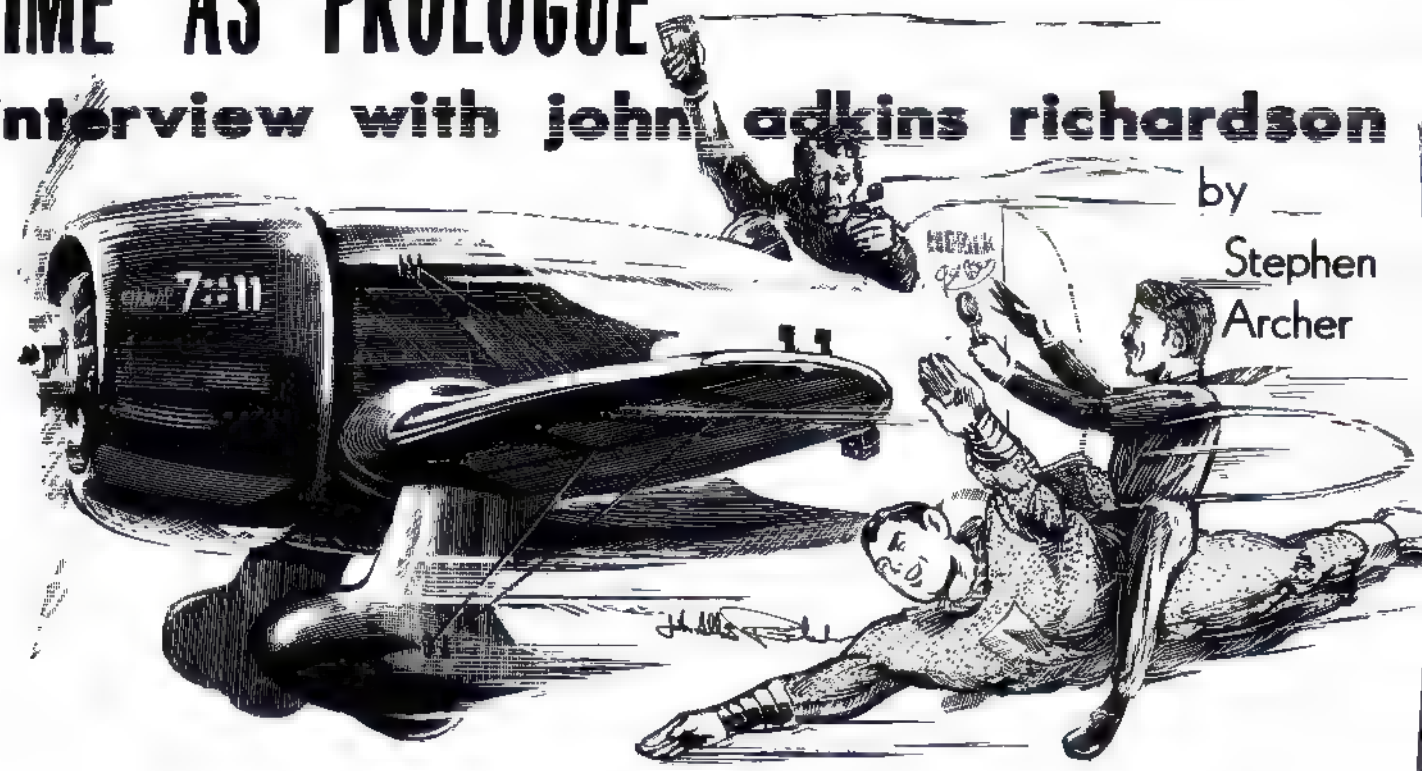
U.S. JONES

IN THE ONLY WAY DARKNESS OF HOPE ME IS MEASURED BY THE DRIP OF MOISTURE FROM THE WALLS MAJOR KNOWS HIS WAIT WILL BE LONG FOR THE RETURN OF THE HEROES HAS NOT BEEN MOUNTED SINCE BEFORE HIS BIRTH SUCH AN "EVENT" IN THE COURT'S LIFE WILL CALL FOR ELABORATE PREPARATIONS
MEMORIES OF HIS ACTIONS MEN OF THE WEB ARE SO LOADED BY HORROR AS TO BE RUMORS USED TO FRIGHTEN CHILDREN HE WOKE UP THOUGH IS REAL IN THE CHAMBERS OF THE MAJOR HEARS ITS SWANSONG MOVEMENTS AND ONCE THE DEATH CRY OF THE BOARD— A BEAST AS TALL AS A CYTOSPORE TREE
ON THE ELEVENTH DAY ME IS THROWN AWAKE BY SUDDEN CLATTER THE DOOR WARNS
HEAVY BLACK ARMOR WAS WORN BY MAJORS A THING THAT FEEDS ON BOSSARDS IS HARD TO TELL BUT PREPARE THE RITUAL BEGINS IN THE THIRD ORBIT
HIS OWN HELMET, WITH THE FOUR FINS OF HIS RANK, AND THE FAMILIAR CUIRASS AND SHIELD EMBLAZONED WITH THE STARLIGHT OF TARRAGE DYNASTY HE HAS NEVER LOST IN SINGLE COMBAT WITH ONE COMPANION'S HELP HE HIMSELF HAS SLAIN BOSARDS IN THE MOUNTAINS OF KANDA THE RITE OF NEMESIS PROVIDE THAT HE BE ASSISTED BY A SECOND PERHAPS
BUT HIS SECOND IS A BRUTISH CLOWN THE HUMPBACK VILGAR, JAILED FOR THE MURDER OF A POOL WHO INSULTED HIM
FOLLOWED BY THIS GROTESQUE MASQUERADE MAJOR STEPS INTO THE BLINDING DAYLIGHT OF THE ARENA THE CROWD STILLS— IN ALL THE CITY NOTHING MOVES BUT FESTIVE BANNERS AND TWO MASSIVE GATES ACROSS THE RING

PASTIME AS PROLOGUE

an interview with john adkins richardson

by Stephen Archer



John Adkins Richardson keeps martinis in an old peanut butter jar in his refrigerator. He is also a full Professor of Art at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, an elected member of the Faculty Senate, a writer of heavy books and of articles for learned journals, a nostalgia buff, a pipe-smoker, and a painter. I confronted one of his paintings in a gallery some years ago. It was a five foot square self-portrait, composed of several dozen painted images mushed together, montage-style, into an entity that reveals the man. His own face peers out suspiciously. His blond wife. The two sons. Captain America, bashing the bejazus out of some evil-doer with his mighty shield. Joe Louis. A few bushy nudes. A Bisley Colt. Captain Marvel. A Gee-Bee racing plane! (I thought I was the only man alive who remembered the Gee-Bee.) Hawkman. An elongated Stuka.

I advanced on the painting and, after half an hour, decided that I knew the man who painted it better than I should know a man that I didn't know. So I hunted him up. He cheered my taste and culture; we got into the martinis."You are a goodlooking S.O.B. and you know comics," said he. "Hmmmm." "If you really like the painting, I'll do one of you." "Gawd." "Have another booze."

My painting, a three-ply gasser, now hangs in my living room, but the conversations go on. "What was the Lone Ranger's last name?" "Anybody knows that it was Reid." "Damn! All right, who was Tank Tinker?" "Get out of my house!"

Richardson knows things that an art professor has no real business knowing about. Early radio programs: "You mean that your wife can actually play 'Priscilla' on that piano?" "Of course, can't yours?" "Hmmmm..." But that's nothing. He knows about things like the history of modern mathematics. In fact, the University of Illinois Press is publishing a book of his on the history of modern art and scientific thought. He reads James Joyce. Gets around in the Paris subways. Knows about guitar construction, obscure jazz compositions, handguns, Capt. Midnight, home design. And, of course, the comics.

"I just got a grant to go to the Library of Congress to study old comic books!" "I thought that was your major at Columbia University." "You mere Assistant Professors are a jealous lot." "But if my tax dollars pay you to -- !" "Get out of my house."

Well, if I can force Richardson to go see the plays I direct ("Lay off of those martinis before J.B.; you'll fall asleep again.") and he can force his comic strips on me ("You don't have to strain to say anything, just sit there and love it.") and we can force our articles on one another ("Acting has definitely improved over the last century; look at the Bernhardt and Duse films." "Ah, but the audiences were much larger circa 1900." "Get out of my house." "Okay, but your idol, Kenneth Burke, moves his mouth when he reads."), then interviews such as the following one are apt to result. It isn't the usual "fandom" stuff. But we had kicks taping it; we hope you do reading it.

THE INTERVIEW

ARCHER: In preparation for this interview, I've looked over a few of these -- "fanzines?" and I'm curious as to how you got involved with them.

RICHARDSON: I became aware of fandom while doing research on the relationship between 19th century academic drawing conventions and 20th century so-called "pop" art. In the hope of making contact with collectors who own comics relevant to my needs I got in touch with G.B. Love and offered to do some work for the S.F.C.A.

A: How has it worked out?

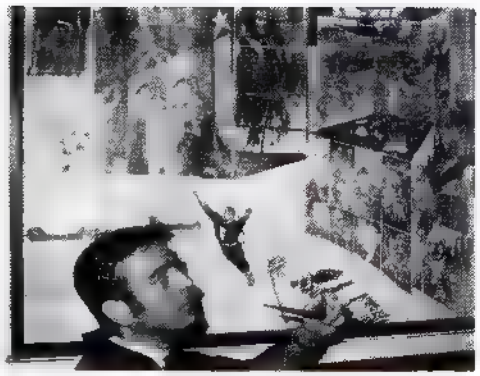
R: So-so. But the real reason I keep doing the stuff is only partly allied with my research; the primary reason is that the nostalgia angle has me hooked. Stan Lee once said that fandom is made up of fanatics. He's right. It doesn't hold for G.B., but some of these characters are examples of an avocation gone astray to the point of madness.

A: Few of them seem to have much interest in literary niceties or significant content.

R: That's mostly because a fan's interests are avocational, unconstrained by social or occupational considerations. One can be more open and free with regard to Edgar Rice Burroughs than with respect to James Joyce simply because Joyce is more vital to the life of the culture. We who grew up with a "Barsoomian" vocabulary can afford to be tolerant of ERB's stilted language and repetitive plotting. We judge someone who writes in the serious literary tradition of Joyce -- John Barth, say -- by an entirely different criterion.

A: Back in 1966 you weren't using different criteria. In "Dada, Camp, and the Mode Called Pop" in the Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism you said you were fascinated by the "sheer strangeness of this submedial culture....Like the totemic carvings of some savage tribe, the low-down comic book and the hard-sell ad seems to signify queer inexpressable yearnings of the irremedially brutalized, yearnings that linger just beyond the grasp of civilized intelligence." Isn't that an attack on precisely what the fanzines represent?

R: Get out of my house! Some public-relations man you are. No, in that article I was trying to account for why intellectuals had become interested in certain kinds of things. When I used the phrase "low-down comic books" I meant to distinguish between something like the old EC line and the ordinary newstand trash.



A: The EC cartoonists were good artists, then?

R: "Good artist" is a difficult term. The greatest artist since Rembrandt was probably Paul Cézanne, but the fans would think he was a clumsy oaf compared to their outstanding favorite, Frank Frazetta. Frazetta is a highly competent draughtsman -- head and shoulders above the usual run of strip cartoonists -- but from an art historical point-of-view he is a virtuoso of the cliché. That isn't meant as a "rap". I should be able to turn out so many miles of coherent figure compositions under that kind of pressure. But he works within well-established forms. His figures are like those of Thomas Couture, a 19th century French academic painter. Frazetta himself probably got this from exposure to life drawing classes dominated by George Bridgman's theories and from studying St. John's illustrations for the Burroughs books. But not Necessarily. The basic formula is current in all sorts of commercial illustration. Why this form and not some other pseudo-classical mannerism? I don't know precisely. But it certainly isn't because the particular style is "realistic". It isn't.

A: Looks real enough to me.

R: Not really..... For instance, the bodies of these super-heroes have only the most incidental relation to the musculature of any living being, no matter how well-developed. This schematization of the male torso dates from the fifth century before Christ. It was invented by the ancient Greek sculptor Polykleitos and the particular disposition of muscles became so formal that it was finally used in the design of armor; in fact, the French name for it is cuirasse esthétique. The artists of the Italian Renaissance were delighted by it -- they associated it with inhuman perfection and the glories of a non-Christian Rome -- and only giants like Michelangelo deviate far from it in rendering heroic figures. It is this disposition of muscles that almost all super-heroes wear as they wear masks. Originally conceived to idealize the mythic beings of Olympus, the cuirasse esthétique is applied by rote to the physiques of masked adventurers whose powers are godlike. Rather ironic.

A: The thing that many of the correspondants to the "letters" columns of these fanzines seem to value above all is detail. Is that any way involved?

R: I don't know. My experience with the fans suggests that if they have a choice between, on the one hand, a figure that is first-rate conservative job with the musculature resolved into a solidly composed entity and, on the other, a less accurate rendering in which every blood

vessel, tendon, and muscle fibre stands out with the clarity of a diagram from Gray's Anatomy, they will almost invariably prefer the latter.

A: The poorer of the two, you mean?

R: Quit putting words in my mouth! It's simply that they seem to prefer the explicit to the implicit. A young man was showing me a cover for Creepy Tales about which he was very enthusiastic. The illustration showed some sort of troglodytic king with the forearm upraised. That arm is seen in lateral view and yet is so rendered as to make the flexor carpi, an ulnaris muscle, seem to be on the same plane as the extensor carpi.

A: Oh, drat! That is a truly vital criticism!

R: Sure, it sounds picky and pedantic. That's just what the young man said. And someone else is bound to say: "Okay, Richardson, what makes you think your stuff is so great?" I don't. All I'm saying is that the fans I know usually prefer what they call "detail" to accuracy. Of course, I realize that things get lost in reproduction and that the original painting may not have the character of the printed image.

A: Well, of the fandom idols, whom do you prefer?

R: Al Williamson, I guess, despite the fact that his narrative development is queer and choppy. But that's because I prefer Alex Raymond's Rip Kirby to practically any other comic strip.

A: That reminds me. This strip doesn't look like the others by you I've seen in literary magazines. They did look sort of like Raymond.

R: Yeah, this one looks as if it had been drawn by someone in a bank. I did try the usual approach; I drew a whole page in the manner of the very last panel, the self-portrait --

A: A good likeness, by the way.

R: Thanks. Anyhow, that page looked a helluva lot better than the final product. But I discarded it because it didn't seem to work with the characters I had playing "cameo" roles. I never did come up with an appropriate style for it. As a comic strip Mnemo is a tremendous disappointment to me. But I think "golden age" fans will get a kick out of it as an exercise in nostalgia if nothing else.

A: Obviously, the name "Mnemo" is a play on words, combining "Nemo" and "mnemonic"?"

R: Obviously.

A: I notice that some of your fan letters ask when or if you are going "pro". What is that supposed to mean?

R: Many of these people are young and they can hardly imagine a higher goal in life than to become a strip cartoonist. I felt the same way when I was going to high school in Wyoming. Now I'm forty years old. I've studied at several art schools and I have a doctorate from Columbia University. I illustrate books and do book jackets off and on. I do portrait painting. I have done sports cartoons for newspapers. While in undergraduate and graduate school I did commercial design and illustration, including advertising comic strips. During the Korean War I was illustrator for Joint Staff Intelligence, Pacific Command. More recently I have done a couple of satirical strips for literary magazines. Of course, I no longer do enough cartooning to keep my hand in. Like everything else, one has to do practice it regularly to be any good at all.

A: How much time do you spend on fandom-connected art work?

R: Depends. I never take more than four hours to do a painting or drawing for fandom. Some will say: "And it looks it!" Perhaps. Much of it isn't as crisp as it would be if I were doing it for an art director's eye. My interest flags after a short time. I got a kick out of doing the Capt. America cover for HBCC but the lettering is lousy.

A: Compared to what I see in most of these fanzines it is expert.

R: That is because much of what you see is done by inexperienced kids who are great people but vastly ignorant of the techniques of graphic reproduction. I was astonished to discover that many of the amateurs do drawings exclusively with pen and ink, imitating what their idols do with a number four red sable watercolor brush. They believe that all of those tapered lines, all of those folds in cloth, all of those masses of black cast shadow are done by outlining the shapes with a pen and then filling them in with ink. My Gawd, that would take hours! And even then it would be an attempt to do with one tool what another does naturally. . . like using a wrench for a hammer.

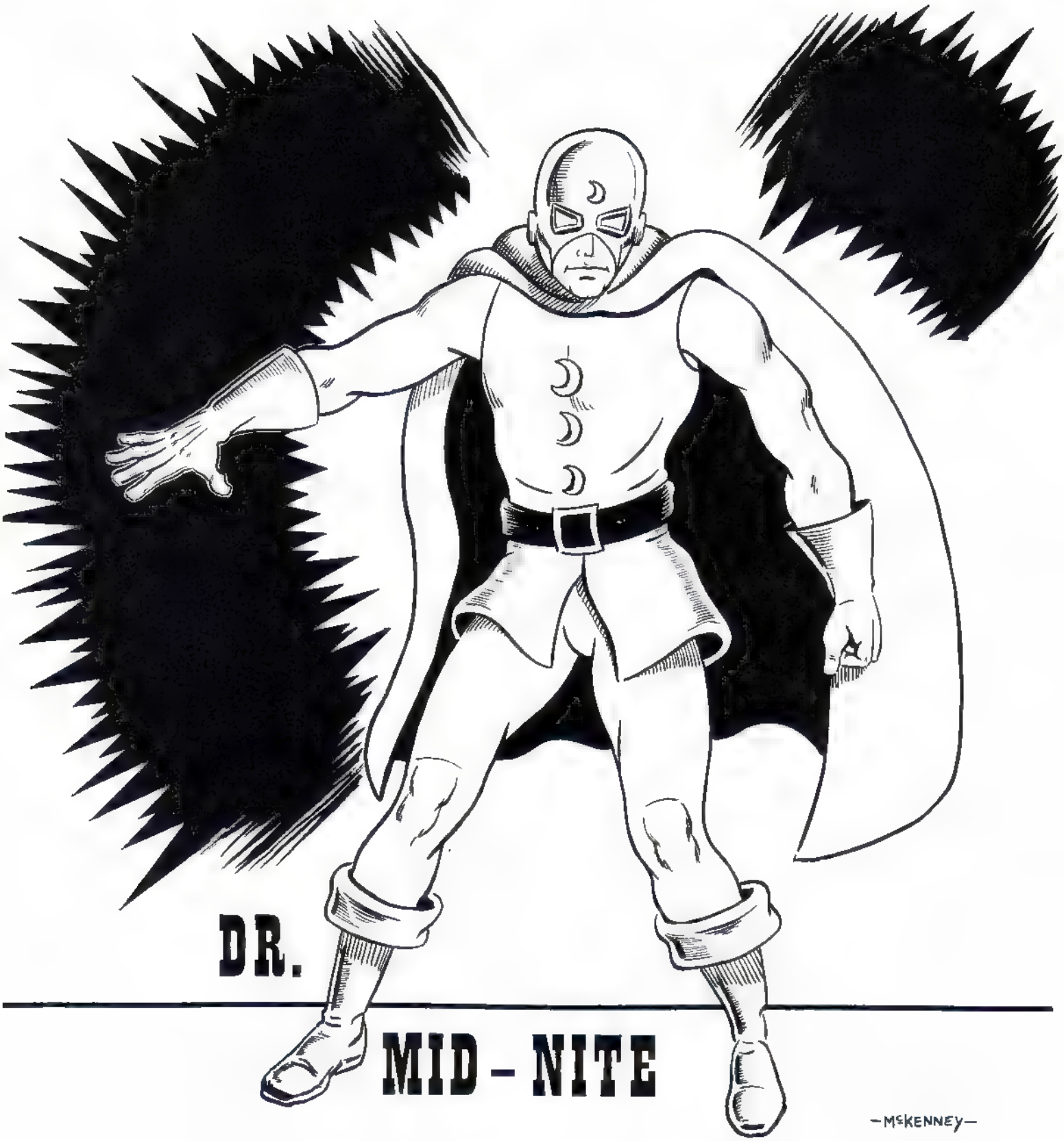
You'd think that before anyone began doing things for the fanzines the fanzines that he would go out and read a few books on commercial art and printing techniques. There are certainly plenty of them on the market. And anyone who wants to became an adventure strip cartoonist should study drawing. And that means actually drawing, not merely copying stuff from existing strips. I have learned in teaching college sophomores life drawing and woodcut techniques that those who can't draw can't copy accurately either.

Too, fandom is extremely cliqueish and each little group is so enamoured of anything and everything it has wrought as to be frightfully uncritical. It is all very well and good to talk about such things as "breakdown" and narrative development, but that talk doesn't make a scratchy, poorly lettered visual presentation acceptable. If the breakdown is good and the drawing abominable then we know that the artist should have done a script and had someone else draw it up. Burne Hogarth has pushed the narrative breakdown about as far as any American but he draws well. Still, if one wishes to study some who is really good at it, he should look at the work of the Italian cartoonist, Guido Crepax, whose strips rival cinematic presentation. His drawing is rather sophisticated for the comics -- based more on fashion art than on the genre of adventure illustration.

A: Not so fast, Ace. A little while ago you admitted that you weren't altogether happy with the appearance of this Mnemo strip. Why should these kids pay attention to what you say instead of what you do?

R: A point well taken. But I have done more-or-less what the youngsters aspire to..And when I work for bread I operate at a higher level of precision. That is the opposite situation

golden AGE GREATS
JOE RABON 1970


DR.
MID-NITE
—McKENNEY—

the
BLACK TERROR
NEWTON

SANDMAN

MASON